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'Forever families'

[Kelly Nankervis](#) , Midland Daily News



Daily news photos/ASHLEIGH D. STARKE

On Tuesday the Endline family of Midland added four more members, bringing the total to 14, during Adoption Day at the Midland County Probate Court. Dee Endline, center, sits among her children, from left, Austin, Andrew, Julia and Nikolas, as Judge Dorene S. Allen finalizes their adoption. "They are a lot of fun," said Dee. "I always have a companion around." After the ceremony the Endlines celebrated at Ponderosa.

Smiley, wiggly and giggly children filled a Midland County courtroom Wednesday, enduring just a bit longer to officially become part of their forever families.

The courtroom, in which Circuit Court Judge Paul J. Clulo usually hears cases on criminal and civil matters, was transformed for Adoption Day and Probate Judge Dorene Allen finalized adoption proceedings for 18 kids, ranging in age from babies to teens.

Clusters of blue and white balloons were tied on furniture, a bunch of teddy bears sat on a podium, and in front of the bench was a basket of cookies -- one for each child being adopted.

Before beginning the proceedings, a happy Allen remarked she is asked frequently how she gets through her job, seeing the abuse and neglect that some children endure, and the family ties broken in hearings terminating parental rights.

"It's because we have so much at stake that I love what I do," she said, calling adoption day the antidote for all the hard times. "It is such a privilege."

Allen has three children of her own, and said just like her own sons, she knew when most of the children in the courtroom before her were born. She also knew within hours that they needed help and protection. Though she knows them intimately through details in their court files, she doesn't meet them until adoptions are finalized.

The first two girls to be adopted, Olivia and Lydia, both 2 years old, sat with their adoptive parents, watching as Allen announced their new parents' names and their new names, then signed the orders with blinking pens. Allen brought enough of the pens to sign each order with a different one, and then give them to the children.

Adoptive parents also got a chance to say a few words, with one woman saying her family was blessed, thankful, happy and busy. She and her husband adopted four children.



Wearing T-shirts displaying a family picture and the last name Manhart, Rachel Manhart legally became the mother of Preston 4, and Brianna, 6, pictured.

After signing the orders, Allen invited the children to the bench to bang the gavel to adjourn their hearings, then all posed for photos.

One woman who's adopted eight children with her husband says the newly adopted children feel like they finally belong somewhere after the process.

"It gives them a sense of security," said Debbie Sian.

She and her husband, Al, have adopted infants and in February, finalized adoptions of two more children, ages 7 and 4. They had been bounced around enough "that they knew this was their forever home," she said.

"They know they never have to move again," and no longer fear that a knock at the door will be a worker waiting to take them to a new home, Sian said.

Not only is it a change for the child, but for the parents as well.

"It's like the day you walk out of the hospital with your new baby when you walk out of the courthouse," she said. "It's just the way it's supposed to be, I guess."

After joining the Sians, the children gain family times during dinner, holding hands to say grace before eating. They help with the five or six loads of laundry that are done each day -- even if all they can do is match socks.

"We're just a family," she said. "It takes somebody special to raise someone else's children, but you do hope that you can give them a sense of morals."

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